

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland

Minister of Foreign Affairs Natalia Gherman

Press Conference

March 30, 2014

Minister Gherman: [As Interpreted]. Good afternoon.

Hello ladies and gentlemen. I would like to welcome you today to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration. It is my pleasure today to welcome here in Chisinau, Moldova Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland together with the American delegation. These leaders in fact represent a signal, a very important one, of support on behalf of the United States of America for the democratic transformation of Republic of Moldova. So we would like to advance this dialogue and this relationship, friendship that is focused on the support for the Republic of Moldova in building a democratic, stable, and prosperous state fully integrated in the European space.

Today we have established together with Victoria Nuland that the bilateral relationship between Republic of Moldova and the U.S. is better than ever. So this was the expression that Mrs. Nuland in fact used when characterizing the quality of our bilateral dialogue.

I would like to remind you that during the recent visit of Prime Minister Leanca to the U.S., a Strategic Dialogue between Moldova and the U.S. was launched, and that is in fact the reason Mrs. Nuland came, to continue the Strategic Dialogue, which was recently launched.

I would like to remind you also that recently we were visited by Ambassador Carlos Pascual who is the special representative in the field of energy, and during the visit of Mr. Pascual we launched a bilateral working group in the energy field.

We are very grateful to the U.S. for all the assistance provided to us in our effort of transforming the energy sector of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time after a break of nearly nine years we were pleased to relaunch the activity of the U.S.-

Moldova Joint Commerce Commission. The Commission met during the visit of Prime Minister Leanca to Washington.

We have expressed our gratitude for the assistance the Republic of Moldova has received from the United States of America in the field of development, democratic transformation, and in different sectors where our cooperation extends.

In 22 years of cooperation the United States of America has offered the Republic of Moldova more than one billion U.S. dollars for different programs and projects. This figure speaks for itself.

Here I would like to express again our gratitude to my colleague Victoria Nuland and to all our American colleagues with whom we cooperate in a very dynamic and intense manner, and in a very productive one, with a view to achieving and implementing bilateral cooperation projects.

I would like to emphasize here the justice and internal affairs sectors. I would also like to remind you of the success in the implementation of the compact program of the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Thanks to this program in the Republic of Moldova we have built and rehabilitated roads of national importance. Bridges have been reconstructed and also social institutions have been rehabilitated.

Certainly we also have discussed the situation and the recent developments in the regional context. We have referred also to the most recent events that relate to us and our partners in the region.

We have reiterated also the objective of the Republic of Moldova to contribute to international security and we have analyzed also a very important event that took place recently, the deployment of a military contingent of the Republic of Moldova as part of the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo KFOR. Recently by this, the Republic of Moldova became not just a consumer but also a contributor to security in the region and on the European continent.

We have discussed also the European agenda of the Republic of Moldova, the year 2014 being a critical year in this sense in what regards our European path. So we have stated that our efforts have to be harmonized, and in fact the objectives that we are promoting in our relationship with the European Union, coincide fully with the objectives we have in our relations with

the United States of America. We have also established that the U.S. will continue to contribute very consistently and generously to the success of our European path of transformation and modernization of the Republic of Moldova in accordance with EU standards and norms, so that the Republic of Moldova is eligible for a clear European perspective.

Thank you very much, and I would like to give the floor now to Victoria Nuland.

Assistant Secretary Nuland: Thank you Minister Gherman, dear Natalia, it's been a wonderful day in Moldova. I am delighted to be back. We had terrific meetings today with the Prime Minister and the government, with the President.

As the Foreign Minister said, I've been involved personally in U.S.-Moldovan relations since independence, some 22 years, and I can attest that the relationship between Moldova and the United States has never been stronger than it is today. The pace of our engagement at the top level has never been so intense.

As the Foreign Minister said, we had a terrific visit of Prime Minister Leanca to the White House just recently. He had a chance to see our President, our Vice President. Secretary Kerry was here in December and had a chance to sample spectacular Moldovan wine and became so enamored of it that he's now your personal representative to the American market, working to get American wine distributors to start importing Moldovan wine.

We are working together as the Prime Minister said, in the energy sector to deepen that relationship. We're working on rule of law together. We're working to grow our trade and investment both ways. And today I am delighted to announce that the United States will contribute an additional \$10 million to support Moldovan border security efforts. This is on top of money that we have been providing for a number of years to support non-proliferation objectives and security objectives on the border.

This is a time of some stress in this neighborhood. It's clear to everybody. We are enormously proud that the United States and Moldova stood together just last week in the UN General Assembly in condemning the annexation of Crimea, condemning the Russian occupation of the peninsula, and speaking out in defense of rule of law and in defense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

It is no accident that I am here today to make clear American support for those same principles here in Moldova -- for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of this country, for the right of Moldova and Moldovans to choose their own future. And, the United States strongly supports the trajectory that Moldova has chosen in strengthening its relationship with Europe. We look forward to the progress that you'll make later this year when all Moldovans including those in Transnistria and [Gagauzia] will benefit from visa-free travel to Europe and will benefit from trade preferences and will be able to grow their businesses and enjoy prosperity.

We don't see this in zero sum terms. We see a future for Moldova where it has equally strong relations with Europe, with Ukraine, with Russia and where in fact it is a bridge of trade and commerce and education and strength across this space, linking Europe and Russia and Ukraine and providing a better future not only for Moldovans, but for people throughout this neighborhood. That's our shared vision. That is going to require continued strong efforts here by all Moldovans on the reform path as the Foreign Minister has said. We talked today about the importance of continued reform in the justice sector, continued reform on the economic side, hard work to weed out corruption. Corruption is a democracy killer, and it is in the interest of all Moldovans to join forces to beat it.

We, and as the Foreign Minister said, the goals that the United States and Moldova share in terms of strengthening your economy, strengthening your democracy, providing good, clean government for the people of Moldova are the same goals of your European integration path. These are mutually reinforcing processes.

Let me just close by saying our goals are the same as yours. We want to see a prosperous, strong, independent, democratic, European Moldova. That is within your grasp. I am delighted to be here with you today.

Moderator: [As Interpreted]. We will accept two questions. One question, Al-Jazeera, and the other one Kommersant.

Question: David Chater from Al-Jazeera English. I was down on the Transnistrian border with Ukraine yesterday and they were banning the entrance of people carrying Russian passports [Inaudible]. Now [Inaudible] amount to an economic blockade. Will this escalate the crisis and do you feel [Inaudible]?

Minister Gherman: I honestly think that we cannot speak about any blockade, because my government is very much in favor of freedom of movement and freedom of circulation that has been traditionally part and parcel of the comprehensive settlement of the Transnistria conflict in the Republic of Moldova. And what would be very helpful in this regard is to bring clarity about this situation using the firsthand experience from the region itself. And from this point of view I would very much advocate for the access of the representatives of the OSCE mission in the Republic of Moldova to the Transnistrian region. Because it is in their mandate and who else but the representatives of the international community and in this particular case of the mission should be allowed full and unfettered access to verify and to report back whether this is the way some media is reporting or whether the situation is different.

And what concerns the position of the government of the Republic of Moldova, I would like to reiterate that within the reintegration process we are making a huge effort to ensure complete freedom of circulation between both sides of the Nistru river. We are implementing a great number of the confidence building measures, supported by our partners from the European Union and the United States of America and we've been always in favor of ensuring greater transparency about these efforts and what is going on in real terms on the ground. Thank you.

Assistant Secretary Nuland: Let me just add, that in response to these Russian assertions we have done our own investigation into this matter. We've been in contact with the government of Ukraine. We have had our own observers up on the border. And I have to say that this is not a blockade by any means. Commerce and trade is continuing to move normally across that border, as are tourist and business people. Of some tens of thousands of people who crossed that border over the last month, some near 200 have been stopped and denied access.

This reflects a concern on the Ukrainian side that there have been young people moving across the border carrying weapons, attempting to smuggle, with intentions to stir up trouble, to be provocateurs. We've seen this, these kinds of provocations, in major Ukrainian cities over the last month so they are exercising their prerogative to be more rigorous in the way they examine people and cargo going across the border. But I would invite you to go up there and take a look. There are no lines of cars, there are no lines of individuals. Things are moving largely normally.

But let me underscore what Minister Gherman has suggested. That if in fact Russia has concerns about the situation on the border, we would invite them to use their influence with authorities in Transnistria to encourage them to invite the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to send observers up to those borders and to give us all an honest picture.

I would also underscore that the EU already has monitors on those borders and they report normal traffic both ways.

Question: [As Interpreted]. Vladimir Soloviev. I have a question to both of you. You, Ms. Nuland, were speaking about support of territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova and I would like to ask something about this.

The thing is that after what's happened in Crimea everyone was saying that the next target could be Transnistria and that we can have a repetition of the Crimean scenario in Transnistria.

So what in your opinion is the probability of this, that we can have a repetition of this scenario in Transnistria? Recently there was a phone call of President Putin with President Obama and they also mentioned the Transnistria there. So I point attention to the fact that Putin when speaking about a fair settlement of the Transnistria conflict didn't say anything about the fact that it should be done within the territorial integrity while conflict was mentioned by Kremlin

So what do you think about it?

And are there any concerns or [inaudible] in this regard?

Assistant Secretary Nuland: As you know, throughout this crisis in Ukraine the United States has stayed in intense diplomatic contact with the Russian Federation at the level of the President, at the level of the Foreign Minister to try to offer our good offices in deescalating the conflict, in trying to facilitate direct dialogue between Russia and Ukraine, to exact legitimate concerns but also to deescalate the security situation.

We are concerned and the President has spoken out about this on his European trips about the large numbers of Russian forces ringing the Ukrainian borders now. This is intimidational at best. We are all concerned about that. But it is because of this concern that we have maintained an intensive pace of

diplomacy. The Presidents did speak on Friday. They agreed that Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary Kerry would continue their dialogue later this evening in Paris to see whether we can get those forces pulled back; to see if we can help get Ukrainians and Russians talking; if we can ensure greater security and stability for citizens throughout Ukraine. Certainly I expect the tensions here will come up in those conversations and the United States will, as it always does, make clear our firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova, for settling issues between Tiraspol and Chisinau by diplomatic means.

Here again, this is another argument for getting OSCE observers into Transnistria and that is something that we support, it's something that Chisinau supports, and something that we'd like to see Moscow support. We are looking to deescalate this conflict.

Minister Gherman: [As Interpreted]. We are starting from a very clear assumption, very clear and obvious from our point of view, the situation in Crimea and the situation in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova are totally different. In order to analyze all the information that is daily received and everything that is reflected in the mass media, we continue our dialogue, a dynamic and constructive one, both with our partners from the U.S. -- and the visit of Mrs. Nuland is the best proof of that fact -- as well as with our partners from the European Union.

So the fact that the government of the Republic of Moldova recognizes the authorities from Kyiv means that we are maintaining a constant dialogue with our partners from Ukraine. And what is not less important, all these subjects that sometimes create concerns after being reported in the mass media including in the mass media from the Russian Federation, are and that raise our concerns, are looked at in a very pragmatic way with our Russian partners.

So I am going to Moscow on April 4th, just in a couple of days, and everything that raised our concerns or doubts from our Russian partners. We will have to check it from the first source and we will have to discuss and this will be in fact the agenda of our bilateral dialogue.

We have noticed also other information published in the mass media from Russia and this is information that reflects the words of the Russian President Putin who says he still insists

on this 5+2 format, the only one for the Transnistrian conflict settlement. The importance of the format was again reiterated.

In this sense I would like to repeat that all this information has to be verified and discussed. This is in fact what we are doing, the government of the Republic of Moldova both with our European partners, American partners, Ukrainian, international organizations, as well as in our direct and open dialogue, a very pragmatic one with the Russian Federation.

Thank you very much.

Assistant Secretary Nuland: I know we promised to take three questions today but I'm getting the high sign that if I want to make it to join Secretary Kerry in his meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov in Paris, we're going to need to take off.

Thank you all very much.

#